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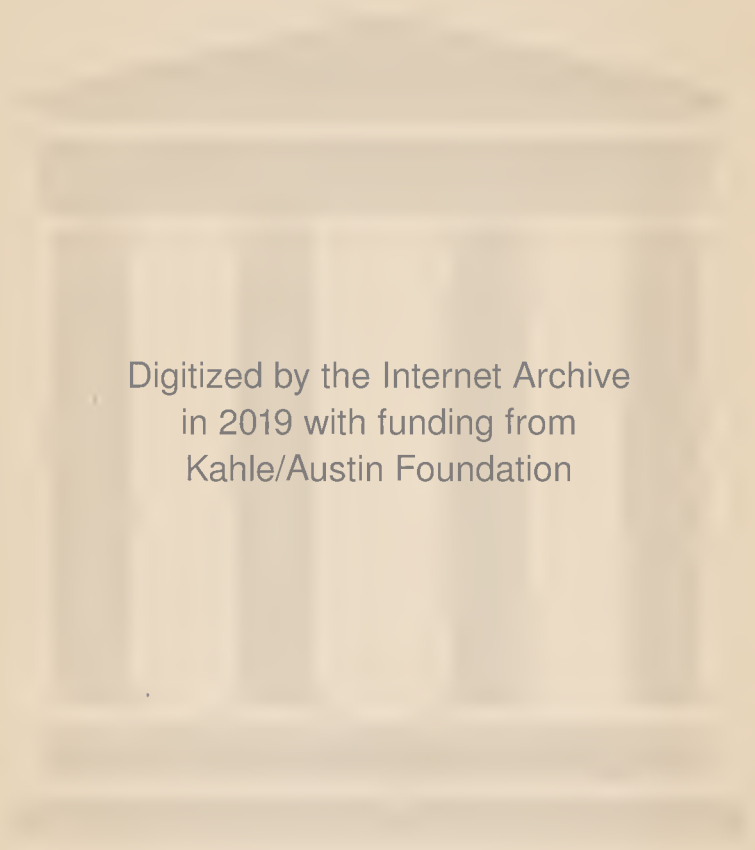


BY
H. L. BEALES

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IN the world of to-day the appeal made by Socialism exercises a growing force. It attracts some, repels others. It has become important to understand it, so that the concrete policies in which it is embodied in this and other countries may be rightly appraised. Socialism as a political and social creed emerged during the industrial revolution. In England a century ago, in circumstances that offer many parallels to those prevailing to-day, Socialism was given articulate expression by a group of writers, and achieved practical influence in labour movements. The genesis of early pre-Marxian Socialism is surveyed in this book against the actual background of early industrialism. The conditions of life in town and factory which the Socialists found it impossible to reconcile with their view of the good life are described, and the main directions of their teaching are analysed. This book provides an introduction to the study of Socialism as well as to the study of the history of industrialism and the labour movement in England.

THE EARLY ENGLISH SOCIALISTS



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By

H. L. BEALES

Reader in Economic History in the University of London



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THE EARLY ENGLISH SOCIALISTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

IDEAS have their history as well as men. The aim of this essay is to examine the history of the idea of socialism in its emergence from the background of early industrialism. It has long been a favourite gibe of those who find the socialist idea repellent that the exponents of socialism are never agreed as to what socialism is. There are, they argue, so many socialisms that they cannot discover its exact scope and content. It is no reply to say that there are many toryisms and a baffling variety of liberalisms. All creeds have their variant forms. There are, and ought to be, many socialisms. A living creed calls for unceasing definition and re-definition. No one doubts that socialists make different criticisms now, as they did a century ago, of the established order of things, economic, social and political. Socialists now, as a century ago, do not always agree among themselves as to priorities in their plan of attack upon capitalist society. Their

tactics and their strategy go through, and have gone through, a variety of phases. Yet their campaign has always looked to a victorious end in the reassessment of the claims of individual property upon society. Socialism, that is, has always envisaged an equalitarian scheme of things. Its sense of purpose has been derived from the ideal of democracy. Not the ideal of parliamentary democracy merely, but the democracy that is to be built upon the twin pillars of liberty and equality. In the history of socialist thought there have been many who have openly scoffed at parliamentarism. Among the pioneer socialists here noticed, there were some who warned their fellows that parliamentary reform would bring them no nearer to the realisation of their hopes. In this country where – unless things are changing – people are politically minded, we are apt to hang too much upon the words of our politicians. Conservatism is what Disraeli said; liberalism is what Gladstone said, unless it be true that Mr. Lloyd George has said something different. Socialists, fortunately or unfortunately, are not in that predicament. None of their political leaders has ever been, in England at any rate, an important exponent of their faith. In any case, their creed has never reached finality of expression as have liberalism and conservatism.

It has always and necessarily been a creed of a future and different social order. It has always and necessarily been impatient of nationalism because equality can know no frontiers save those of administrative convenience. An account of the early socialists of this country can be no more than an analysis of a phase in the evolution of a creed, and that analysis must, in the nature of things, show disagreements and inconsistencies among its votaries.

The circumstances of the birth of socialism were those of early industrialism. In the uneasy times of the early nineteenth century, the voice of protest was raised by all sorts of people about all sorts of issues. The early socialists were concerned not merely to protest against the hardness of the labourers' lot – there were plenty of people who had no socialism in them who agreed with them about that – but to prove that it was unnecessary. Broadly, there were two schools of thought about poverty. One was humanitarian: it offered sympathy and charity and the reform of proved abuses. The other was socialistic: it opened up the vision of reasonable affluence, declaring that poverty was caused by plunder, the plunder of the poor by the rich, and could be permanently eliminated. In their best expression both schools of thought

achieved considerable influence. Benthamite utilitarianism became the chief reformist influence. Socialism, necessarily 'agin the government' whether Tory or Whig, was outside the pale of ordinary political discussion. It could be ignored by those in authority save at the odd moments when it seemed necessary to persecute it. Its sphere of direct influence lay in the obscure places where working men combined for a political or economic end, or where a few intrepid enthusiasts tried to build a self-contained community, an island of socialism in a hostile environment. It had necessarily to bear a character of futility. Yet it had its indirect influence. It served to sharpen the conscience of governments that might otherwise have been inactive or complacent. It helped to give the popular backing that was necessary to movements like that for parliamentary reform. It fabricated a body of new heterodoxies that became, in part, at any rate, the orthodoxies of to-morrow. If Socialists were impatient of Cobden's crusade, their work did much to make it acceptable. It has always been the fate of left-wing movements to have their ideas applied or misapplied by their opponents. The English movement was no exception. In this sense, and in their initiation of a socialist movement that has come to achieve a great present influence and a

greater promise, the early English socialists deserve their place among the makers of the modern world.

The way in which the early English Socialists expressed themselves has for us an air of unreality. We appreciate the crudities more readily than we grasp the cogency and freshness of their work. We have forgotten, most of us, the parallel crudity of their opponents, whether politicians or economists. 'There is a notion very prevalent among the upper classes,' wrote Thomas Walker, 'that in order to be able to command the quality of labour they require, it is necessary to keep the labouring classes in a state of dependence or bordering upon it, and, though this unchristian feeling is no doubt frequently disguised to those who entertain it, yet their actions constantly correspond with its influence, even when they appear to be dictated by disinterested kindness.' Walker was a Metropolitan Police Magistrate and no one could accuse him of socialism, even though his father had been put on trial for sympathising with French revolutionaries in an inconveniently articulate manner. The socialists said the same thing; but when they said it, somehow it sounded more positive and more menacing. When they coupled with their protest against dependence the outrageous demand for freedom, and when they stated their demand for

freedom in terms of equality, of the abolition of the drones in society, they passed beyond the decencies. Walker told the labourers, again in his periodical, *The Original* (1835), that they 'ought to be better fed, better clothed and better lodged. Every labourer in the land should be able to earn sufficient wages to procure himself a constant supply of comfortable clothing and nourishing food; he ought to have the means of bringing up his children decently, and of teaching them what is suitable to their condition; he should be able to provide against the common accidents and sicknesses of life, and also to lay by a sufficient store to maintain his old age in comfort.' The socialists told them that, too. But while the Walkers of the day said these things in a kindly enough tone, they did not tell him how to set about getting them accomplished. The socialists did. Their plans may have been premature, but, remaining untried, they remained an inspiration. Seen against the actual background of the environment of early industrialism, the crudities fall into their place and the essential quality of their vision stands out clear. Theirs was the most discerning analysis made in that day of the new forces at work in society, and the most convincing diagnosis of the causes of confusion.

CHAPTER II

THE TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS

AT dawn on 24 February, 1834, half a dozen farm labourers, James and George Loveless (or Lovelass or Lovelace), Thomas and John Stanfield (or Standfield), James Hammett and James Brine, were arrested as 'evil-disposed persons'. They were shut up in Dorchester gaol and their heads were shorn. On 18 March they were put on trial on a charge of administering an oath. After a perfunctory trial and a couple of days during which – it was his first assize – Mr. Baron Williams excogitated the penalty he would impose, they were sentenced to seven years' transportation. When sentence had been pronounced George Loveless was allowed to make a statement. He said, 'My Lord, if we have violated any law, it was not done intentionally. We have injured no man's reputation, character, person, or property. We were uniting together to preserve ourselves, our wives and our children from utter degradation and starvation. We challenge any man or number of

men to prove that we have acted or intend to act different from the above statement.' No evidence was submitted to the court which could have rendered this statement invalid. None was available because the statement was true. The six Tolpuddle labourers had, it is true, established in their village a branch of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, but they had not taken any steps, individually or in concert, to present any demand for higher wages. They had enrolled members in their branch, and it was proved that on 9 December, 1833 Brine had taken two labourers to Stanfield's house and there the enrolment ceremony had been performed. In this initiation the labourers had been blindfolded, a passage had been read from the Bible, and an oath – whose exact character could not be established at the trial – had been administered. This had been done under the shadow of a painted sketch of a skeleton, revealed when their eyes were uncovered. The Bible had been kissed and James Loveless, in a white surplice, had urged them, 'Remember your end'. Clearly enough, an oath of secrecy had been exacted – for all the world as though they were freemasons, whereas they were merely farm labourers who had been told to expect a wage reduction from seven shillings to six shillings a

week. They were not accused of intimidation or riotous behaviour or sedition or even of being Socialists or Agitators. They were accused of offending against a Statute of 1797, passed, when the fleets at Spithead and the Nore were mutinous, to prevent wicked people indoctrinating members of the armed forces of the Crown with dangerous thoughts and leading them into sedition. The Statute of 1797 was obsolete and, anyhow, had no reference to civil activities.

As Mr. Baron Williams observed in his solemn charge to the grand jury, 'It has been observed by moralists, among whom I may mention Dr. Paley, (George Loveless had "a small theological library" as well as a wife and three children; he would appreciate the reference) that a frequent and familiar administration of an oath even for purposes of justice is much to be regretted, and if there be any truth in such an observation, how much more applicable is it (to) the administration of an oath, which places the party in so doubtful a state of morals that a casuist would be puzzled to decide what cause the party ought to pursue.' The chairman of the grand jury was the M.P. for the division: clearly, it was very important that this trial should end satisfactorily. All the members of the jury before whom the case was argued,

Loveless tells us, were farmers and millers, an objection against a dissenting tradesman having been allowed. They were people who would understand what these farm labourers were about, that is – virtually judges in their own cause, it must have seemed to the prisoners in the dock. The only document brought forward by the prosecution was a copy of the rules of the ‘General Society of Labourers’ abstracted from a work-box of Mrs. Loveless, and never proved to have been related to the proceedings of 9 December. The conduct of the judge was in all ways in accordance with the proprieties, unless it be true, as George Loveless later said, that he emitted the remark that the members of the jury would forfeit the good opinion of the grand jury if they returned a verdict of not guilty. However, they made no mistake about their verdict. How could they? It must have been as obvious to them as it was to William Ponsonby, M.P., chairman of the grand jury, that these men were dangerous. ‘William Ponsonby told me,’ wrote Greville in his diary, ‘that the demoralisation in that part of the country is very great – the distress not severe, no political disaffection, but a recklessness, a moral obtuseness, exceedingly disgusting.’ The best way to deal with moral obtuseness is the sharp way of the law,

and so these simple God-fearing labourers, local preachers two of them, were singled out for special attention. They were 'made examples of', as the good and great like to put it.

The Times said their sentence was 'too severe' but added that it would be useful 'if it spreads alarm among those more acute and powerful disturbers of the town population throughout England'. Neither *The Times* nor anyone else had the least doubt of the real charge against the Dorchester labourers or the real intention of their trial. 'The formal charge against them,' said *The Times*, 'was that of administering and being bound by secret, and therefore unlawful, oaths: whereas the real gravamen of their guilt was their forming a dangerous union, to force up, by various modes of intimidation and restraint, the rate of labourers' wages.' For once *The Times* agreed with O'Connell, who declared in the House of Commons that the Statute of 1797 was 'only now raked up to inflict an enormous punishment on unfortunate men who were wholly ignorant of its existence and innocent of any moral offence.'

There are things about the incident which remain unexplained. Loveless and his fellows had been given three days' warning of the intention to launch an attack upon them. Three days before

their arrest bills had been posted in Tolpuddle which intimated that the Unlawful Oaths Act of 1797 rendered the village trade unionists liable to a penalty of seven years' transportation. That Act was obsolete. The form of the attack, that is, had been carefully thought out; outside this Act, no crime had been committed. Who prompted this attack and who determined the form it was to take? Was it one of those instinctive acts of self-defence which property has never failed to produce in moments of danger? Individual property-owners may often have been stupid in asserting their claims, but always, in this country at any rate, they have shown a subtle skill in devising the effective action at the critical moment.

Was the attack on the Dorchester labourers locally conceived and locally carried through? If so its nameless engineer deserves a better reward than anonymity. Or was it the Act of Government, locally applied but centrally conceived? We may never know the answer to these questions, but we do know that the author of the Tolpuddle plot was a shrewd fellow. For the attack was effective. If danger of revolution really existed, as many thought, it did much to dissipate it. Actually, the appearance of danger was far greater than the reality. Yet the Tolpuddle martyrdom must have

satisfied those who needed a vindication of the power of the State, and it must have delighted the political economists. Melbourne said that 'the law in this case has been most properly applied,' and a fervent 'Thank God' must have echoed his satisfaction in many places. There are always people like that.

There were protests, and they came promptly, against the Dorchester incident. They came from all sorts of places – Oxford, Cheltenham, Yeovil, Chard, Gomersal, as well as Manchester, Nottingham, Stoke, Bradford, Newcastle, London; from country town and industrial alike. Hume later told the Commons in his dry way that 800,000 people had signed petitions of protest. But these were handled firmly, despite the excellent and reasonable presentation of the trade unionists' case by radical surgeon Thomas Wakley, M.P. for Finsbury, in the House of Commons. The 'example' had to be carried through, whatever the 'friends of the productive classes' who poured in their petitions might say. Melbourne passed on to His Majesty the petition signed by a quarter of a million Londoners, but he refused to receive the demonstrators or to be impressed by the quiet orderliness of the public procession (estimated to taste at between 25,000 and 200,000). He had

taken precautions by having all London 'alive with troops, artillery and police', but no disorder was ever threatened. He refused, too, to allow delay or mitigation of the sentence. He did not share Lord Howick's view that the labourers knew themselves to be wicked because they held their meetings at night, but he had a public duty to perform. He was perhaps helped in his policy of firmness by the Sussex member who said the trial had been a godsend because it caused trade unions in his county to disappear. So, early in April the Dorchester labourers had been taken in irons to Salisbury and from Salisbury to Portsmouth, where they were lodged on the *York* hulk. In May they had been shipped off to Australia, and there they remained till early in 1837. They were granted a free pardon in 1836, almost exactly two years after sentence had been passed upon them; they were allowed to leave Australia some months later; they returned to England in June. By then the Dorchester incident had ceased to be either an embarrassment to the Government or a stimulus to trade unions. It remains an illuminating commentary on the mind of the times as well as an important incident in the history of trade unionism.

There was no socialism, revealed or latent, among the village labourers who were thus

hauled out of their pauperised obscurity to become visible for a moment upon the stage of public events. But their adventures serve to illuminate the background in which the early socialists were framing their indictment of existing society and their outline of a juster and happier social order. The Tolpuddle martyrdom cannot be explained solely in terms of public events: it springs, with other related events, from the social forces that were operating to produce Disraeli's New England Toryism and early English Socialism as well as Melbourne's temporarily successful Whiggism.

New lines of demarcation were appearing among the politicians. Melbourne stood for the old order, as Whigs, even when disguised as Liberals, always have. Disraeli stood for liberalism, a liberalism that would do everything for the poor save get off their backs, as conservatism in its better moments always has. Working people could see but little difference between them, and it was the function of the Socialists both to sharpen this discrimination and to shape an alternative creed. They would have won an earlier hearing had the reform of Parliament in 1832 been less meagre, and had the radicals achieved the political success their qualities deserved but their purses were inadequate to obtain. As it was, working-class organisations

were again put on the defensive: it was easy to attack them and deprive them of their leaders. The concentration of power in the hands of the representatives of property and privilege was too complete for them to make headway against it. There were plenty of events beside the prosecution of the Dorchester labourers to impress that upon them.

In 1838 another trial took place which has many points of similarity to that of the Dorsetshire labourers. Five Glasgow cotton-spinners were indicted on serious charges, and sentenced to seven years' transportation. The jury was unanimous in declaring that the charges of murder and arson were not proven, but by a majority of one it declared them guilty of forming an illegal combination to raise wages and instigating people to engage in riotous behaviour. Tempers were running high in the Glasgow area. There had been disorders in the strikes of the previous year, and trade unionism was regarded as a positive menace to Glasgow industry. Archibald Alison, then Sheriff of Lanarkshire, whose voluminous *History of Europe* is visible in every second-hand bookshop in the country, was mainly responsible for this attack on the workers, and it seems likely that he had about as much justification as the

Dorsetshire magistrates. It is probable that in the Glasgow case, too, a serious miscarriage of justice took place, and it is significant that in 1840 the five cotton-spinners were pardoned. Like their Dorchester colleagues they were men of good character and, like them too, they were regarded by working-class people as victims of persecution by legal process. Again Wakley tried to interest the House of Commons in their treatment, but O'Connell persuaded the House against an inquiry by means of a powerful and wrong-headed attack on trade unionism in general, and Dublin trade unions in particular. It is true that the Government appointed a Select Committee to inquire into the whole question of trade unionism, but it never issued a report though a couple of volumes of evidence remain as proof of its labours. Sheriff Alison's attack did its work quite successfully, despite the spirited protests of trade unionists. The Glasgow union was broken, and in the hard years that followed, trade unionism was barely kept alive. The difficulty of maintaining any sort of working-class organisation was almost insuperable in these days when social services did not exist, wages were low and in some cases microscopic, and employment was bad. The spirit could make little headway against the half-starved flesh. The

surprising fact is that the Chartist movement gained so wide a backing, for it was on that multi-form activity that the workers spent their zeal after 1838.

'Were we asked to give a definition of a trade union, we should say that it was a Society whose constitution is the worst of democracies – whose power is based on outrage – whose practice is tyranny – and whose end is self-destruction.' Thus wrote an anonymous and hostile exponent of *The Character, Object and Effects of Trade Unions* a hundred years ago. The author of this booklet used the term democracy as an epithet of condemnation: to call these associations 'democracies' was to render it impossible for right-minded people to think them anything but evil and subversive of the established foundations of the social order. Everyone knows how wrong-headed right-minded people are apt to be. And so as one reads, a century after it was written, this exposure of trade union wickedness, its fury and its fear and its attempt to give its readers the creeps cause no deeper feeling than a tolerant amusement.

What were these pioneer trade unionists trying to do? They were bent upon the task of raising wages. 'It has been supposed,' says our author, 'that these Societies have some connection with the

political circumstances of the times. Their present vigour has been attributed to the Reform Bill, to the French Revolution, to an hostility to the Established Church, to a spread of democratical principles. . . . There does not appear to be the smallest ground for these opinions. Their whole object has been to raise wages, and to this point alone all their energies have been directed. With many, a principle of their constitution is to abstain from all interference in religion and politics; and to this, they have all, as far as we are aware, studiously adhered. . . .' Among some 'observations and cautions' appended to the rules of one of the most extensive unions in Yorkshire, are the following:—'Brethren, you are cautiously to avoid all religious disputes, as quarrels from this source have ever been found prejudicial, and often destructive to society; let every brother freely enjoy his own opinion, but not lord it over another, nor introduce any particular intricate wrangling in the Lodge. Political disputes having an equal tendency to inflame the passions and sour the temper, are therefore with equal propriety excluded from our Lodges; you are enjoined to pay a due obedience to the laws and respect to the Government of our country, and to live as peaceable subjects, but never to disturb

or embroil the Lodge with your particular opinion of State affairs.' . . . The regulations of the Coalminers' combination enact, 'that if any member speak disrespectfully of the State and laws of the nation, His Majesty, or either of the Houses of Parliament, or any magistrate, he shall forfeit 2s. 6d. for every such offence.' But were they not actuated by these feelings, it is not likely that they would ever assume any strong political character, so long as the law on this subject remains in its present state. . . .'

The unions did not want to talk politics, and they dared not anyhow. Then why were they attacked in 1834 and in 1838?

The answer to that question contains no surprises. Put crudely, it is that they were becoming a nuisance and must be taught a lesson. But the crude explanation does not go far enough. It is much better to seek deeper reasons in the inner mind of the Government of the day. That mind is clearly portrayed in Melbourne's correspondence.

Melbourne, and others with him, feared the processes of change. While it was still uncertain what sort of Parliament would issue from the Reform Act of 1832, he exchanged anxious letters with Wellington about political unions in the

country districts and he said, 'The real thing to be feared is the prevalence of the Blackguard Interest in Parliament.' Parliament, that is, was the home of interests and a threat to those established there haunted his mind. 'It is quite clear that when the new Parliament meets we shall be pressed for further reforms. . . . I am determined not to advance any further.'

The renovation of the State made no appeal: the *status quo ante* did. 'In consequence of the message I received from your lordship, I have made enquiries respecting a political union in this country. There is every reason to believe that there is one, or several local societies corresponding with each other. . . . It appears that the members of these unions contribute a penny a week each.' 'There have been instances,' Wellington tells him, 'of menaces to farmers who intimated an intention of lowering the wages of the labourers in their employment. . . . It is said that half the the labourers in the country are enrolled in these societies. . . . It is understood by the labourers that the money subscribed will be applied to provide for their existence [*sic*] when they shall be unemployed, and to provide arms to enable them to defend themselves.' Fear is cramping judgment, evidently. Melbourne replied that these societies were not illegal while

they continued separate and independent, but that they would break the law if they in any way communicated one with the other. 'It is scarcely unfair to say that he had action against them in his mind. The unions discussed in the correspondence were political, not trade, unions, but they were not very clearly differentiated. When the King himself expressed his alarm at the progress of the trade unions in Birmingham, Melbourne assured him that their clamour was due 'to the strong impression made upon them by the recent conviction in Dorsetshire, and to their consciousness of the mortal blow it struck at the root of their whole proceedings.' He had no conception of the workers' need of combination, but he had a clear view of the danger of consolidating them by new legislation which would end their activities. That he could judge the situation coolly was manifest from a letter of October, 1831. 'It is coming to be admitted by the workmen themselves . . . that the unions have generally failed. . . . At present their language is an admission that their partial and local unions have failed; that in such circumstances the masters are sure to get the better, and have done so; that they must have a general and national union. But even if they should establish such a general combination and co-operation, the

same causes which have baffled them in the one case – namely, the multitude of workmen, the necessity of subsistence, and the consequent competition for employment – will have precisely the same effect in the other.’ Melbourne spoke no less than the truth. The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was bound to fail. That action of Government gave it the *coup de grâce*, shows on whose side Government fought.

CHAPTER III

THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND

DESCRIPTIONS of the condition of England between Waterloo and the Great Exhibition have tended latterly to be quieter in their general tones. That England was not yet very fully industrialised has to be admitted, and that village labourers and the workers in industries untouched as yet by factory organisation were at least as badly off as the textile workers of Manchester and Glasgow is true also. The invasion of England by pauperised Irish folk, too, is a factor of importance, and the consequences that sprang from the survival into peace-time of the burdens of war lasted over a long span of weary years. It is not the purpose of this chapter, however, to add one more to the already numerous assessments of the condition of England in the first half of the nineteenth century. Its aim, rather, is to see England as contemporaries saw it, to outline the environment from the examination of which the early Socialists derived their doctrines. These critics of their day were not perverse people.

They were in deadly earnest in their search for remedies for conditions which they believed to be both evil and unnecessary. They did not believe that things would right themselves. They did not believe in the nostrums discussed in Parliament. Their minds were impressed, even obsessed, by the phenomena of the new industrialism and by the contrasted extremes of wealth and squalor. To them and to others industrialism presented a vast and complicated problem. To some people that problem was primarily the problem of the displacement of labour, what we have come to call technological unemployment. 'Where,' asked one in 1833, 'where is the combing and spinning, cotton-weaving, silk-filling, cruel-filling, hemp-dressing, sack-weaving, paper-making, hand-sewing, hot-pressing and printing; where the employment general till the last few years? All absorbed by machinery.

'Where is the distaff and 'spindle, where the employment in knitting, in the manufacture of hemp and flour? Where the employment for women and children, formerly carrying comfort and independence to the *home* of every cottager? All absorbed by machinery, or sacrificed to the cry of *cheap*.'

An address issued by Manchester spinners told

the same story in more specific terms. 'There were in thirty-six coarse firms in 1829 – 1,088 spinners employed; and in 1841 only 448, and those 448 were working upon 53,353 spindles more than the 1,088 men were in 1829, in addition to throwing out of employment 640 men. If the wheels must have continued the same size as in 1829, their numbers would have been 1348 employed, thus in reality throwing out of work 1,100 men through the improvements in machinery, and we regret to add, that those who remained in employment have been reduced upwards of 60 per cent, which has thrown out of circulation from the spinners and their piecers the enormous sum of £2,700 per week, or £135,000 a year, allowing fifty weeks to the year. Whether legislative interference or individual avarice has brought about this state of things, we do not attempt to decide, but this we do know, that thousands of our fellow-workmen, their wives and families, have fallen victims, whilst those who are in employment are so much overworked, that they are too old for their business when they should be in the prime and vigour of life.'

To this sort of complaint political economy, and even the anti-Corn-Law League, offered an overwhelming reply, but somehow it did not satisfy. In one shop in Manchester, introduced since 1838,

'there are 20 self-acting lathes, equal to *one hundred men*, one man or a boy attends two of them. Eight planeing machines, equal to *ninety-six* men, one man, or a boy, attends one of them. One *nut-cutting* machine, upon a further improved principle, equal to twenty men, employs one boy only. One slotting machine, equal to twenty men, one man or boy to direct it.'

To some people, the factory problem was chiefly the problem of inadequate remuneration. It would be hard to say that the concrete view of the men was less reasonable than the wage-fund theory of the economists. A typical statement of the workers' case is the following. 'In Hutchinson's print works, near Ratcliffe, there were five printing machines in 1842, which turned off 250,000 printed pieces. . . . These five machines employed five men as front tenters, and five boys or girls as assistants. The wages of these fifteen persons was £13 10s. in the week. During this time, many of the block-printers were starving upon two or three days' work a week; and very often not more than one day; sometimes three or four weeks without any work at all. Had the above number of pieces been printed by the block, as they would have been a short time since, it would have taken 300 men and 300 boys to assist them. Fifteen only were

employed by these machines, receiving £650, or on an average, 18s. a week amongst them; while, if the 250,000 had been printed by the block, at the rate paid upon the machines were set to work, viz., 2s. per piece for three colours, which the above had in, it would have cost £25,000. The boys received 1½d. to the shilling paid by the master, which would have been an addition of £3,100, making a total of £28,100. And had the *ten million pieces*, which were printed by the machines alone, as stated in the petition of 1842, been paid for at the above rate, viz., 2s. per piece, it would have amounted to £1,000,000 for the men and £125,000 for the boys, as tierers. Total, *one million, one hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds*; whilst the money paid for this quantity of work done by the machines was only £26,000; loss to labour, £1,000,000.' Clearly there was room for the work of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge !

To some, again, the factory problem was the problem of industrial discipline and relationships. The men objected to being reduced to a mere factor of production, especially as the methods adopted for their subjection were harsh and at times unsavoury. 'We have now by us, a list of fines from the warehouse department, said to be taken from the weavers for bad work, which, by-the-by,

the weaver seldom knows anything about until the "bate-list" is shown to him by the overlooker, and probably in many cases after the piece is sold in the market. The list we have, is in narrow slips, and when put together measures *three yards and a half*, and the amount of abatements on it is THIRTY-FIVE POUNDS SEVENTEEN SHILLINGS AND TEN-PENCE. At this mill, a short time ago, one of the cut-lookers was discharged, and another placed in his situation. When he had been there a fortnight, the master asked him, 'How it was he had so little on his "bate-book"?'; the man replied, 'I think there's a great deal. I 'bate the weavers so much that I can't for shame look them in the face, when I meet them in the street.' The master answered, 'You be d—d, you are five pounds a week worse to *me* than the man that had this situation before you, and I'll kick you out of the place.' The man was discharged to make room for another *who knew his duty better*. Of course, factories require their discipline. Sentimentalists ask that it be inspired by the team-spirit. How could it be a hundred years ago? Industrial units then had to be dragooned as the public-school spirit was not available. Complaints about the process were, one may be sure, thoroughly justified. Quoting again the same reliable observer; 'A rather laughable occurrence took place a short

time ago in one of these mills – a weaver happening to pass by the counter in the warehouse, saw the “bate-book” lying thereon without its usual bodyguard, and knowing that it was an old offender, immediately seized and dragged it before a *court martial* of his fellow operatives, and after a careful investigation, the book was found to contain forty pounds of abatements from the work-people’s wages. It was sentenced to disgorge the plunder, which upon the application of a little *fire*, it immediately complied with.’ In that factory the secrets of industrial management had not yet been mastered. When the master, who was ‘as a man in a state of delirium’, called into council all save ‘those that could have given the most important evidence’, it was agreed to ask the workers to declare how much they had been ‘bated since the last pay day. Only one solitary soul could remember being ‘bated at all during that time. Windfall profits that one cannot grudge the workers – they were very infrequent. ‘The working-classes will ever look upon this as no better than a *brigand system*, that thus allows the employers to assume a power over the Law, and by their nefarious plotting, first *create* what they are pleased to term offences, and then *punish* them. They are both law makers, judges and jurors.’

To a larger number of observers, including philanthropists and landowners outraged by the industrial attack on agricultural protection, the heart of the factory problem was its ruthless exploitation of the workers, men, women and children. The opponents of factory regulation, who see in it to-day a vast historical error, are arguing about theories. Working people knew the fact. A few average ones among them may be recalled. An infirmary surgeon wrote in 1831, 'It has come to my knowledge that a Mill owner in consulting his Overlooker as to the propriety of putting the children on another hour at night' [the children were at this time working from 5 in the morning to 9 at night] 'was informed by the Overlooker that he would get no more work out of them by it, for as it was, he was obliged at night to shake them to prevent them falling asleep on their legs. Is it not a natural inference to draw from this circumstance that many of the dreadful 'machinery accidents, which we meet with, happen to poor children while in that helpless state ; the hands and bodies getting involved in the machinery while the eyes are closed? We have at the Infirmary about twelve hundred accidents in the year, about half of these are from machinery and, to make a guess, two-thirds of the latter number happen to children

under 15 years of age, particularly the finger and hand cases.' The surgeon of another infirmary stated, 'That although it is very certain scrofulous diseases are greatly aggravated by overworking, and that the tendency to scrofula itself may probably be produced by it, yet we can speak with greater confidence respecting its effects in producing distortion of the knees, ankles and feet, many of which cases have been brought to the Infirmary in so aggravated a degree as to be incurable.' These examples are not taken from the evidence given before Government inquiries because some people are reluctant to accept its validity. All that is suggested is that the factory system had a bad side which workers knew about, and evidence (like the above) is available for those who care to seek it out. If it be pointed out – as it has been quite commonly in recent years – that conditions in other employments, including agriculture, were as bad or worse, the working-class indictment of society is merely strengthened. So, too, is the claim of the trade unionists and the socialists to a more careful hearing. There is something odd about people (like Mr. W. H. Hutt in *The Factory System of the Nineteenth Century*, Economica No. 16, March, 1926), who defend these early factory conditions on the ground that people preferred factory

labour because it was better paid, and that people could command neither enjoyment, nor commodities for use, in the leisure that shorter hours would have brought. As it took a generation of agitation to persuade the legislature to restrict the labour of children of nine years of age to a sixty-nine hour week – and then only in cotton mills – there was little opportunity of learning how to use leisure ‘properly’, whatever that may mean. Working men, of course, drank too much. They ought not to have behaved like the wealthy, because their means were not adequate to it. They would have been better off if they had practised the virtues of thrift even more than they did. Yet even with the support of their friendly societies, burial clubs and trade unions, they could not command even moderate security. ‘No instance can be found,’ said one of the leading statisticians of the nineteenth century to his fellow-economists of the British Association, ‘of the decay of a community in which the humbler classes, in full possession of personal freedom and wholly apart from any artificial reliance or support could, each by their own labour, earn the means of substantial independence. If for any length of time a community be strong and sagacious enough to solve practically the great problem of combining the largest and

most orderly freedom with ample wages earned in fair competition with all the world, we may depend upon it that the foundations of such a State are too firmly set to be shaken by any ordinary catastrophe.' Apart from the grammar, Mr. Newmarch's rather ponderous statement is reasonable enough. But the England of early industrialism did not come within the boundaries of that 'if'. That is why working-people were more inclined to agitate against low wages than long hours. That was why 'free-traders are so anxious to prevent by ticket-meetings the attendance of their enslaved work people.' That is why the Cobdenite talk left so many of them unmoved. 'The working-classes know and feel that machinery has cheapened to them nothing so much as their labour; *that* of course, they have, in great abundance and at extremely low prices, at least those whom machinery has not as yet deprived of labour altogether.

The comments on the factory system above quoted could be vastly enlarged in range and repulsiveness, but other aspects of it call for mention. To quite a number of observers the industrial problem was primarily and essentially a problem of debased morals. Such people generally made a contrast between the pre-factory conditions of comparative decency and the concentrated

immorality of the factory towns. Their case is rather muddled. Conditions below ground in the mines were at least as deleterious to health and morals as conditions in the factories. And the exaggerations were enormous, as is the way with moralists. There is no gain in balancing the criticisms of Gaskell against the defence of Dr. Ure. The *Manufacturing Population of England* (1833) is a painful book: and the *Philosophy of Manufacturers* (1835) is an irritating smug book. Ure's pages on the *Moral Economy of the Factory System*, and especially his chapter on the *Health of Factory Inmates* (the right term in 1835!) are nauseating. The villain of the piece was rather the conditions of the town than those of the factory, and the inheritance from the past was not rich enough for the new towns to be anything but wildernesses. The factory must bear the major blame, even so. In our day we know that crimes of violence against property go up or down in correspondence with the level of employment. A century ago, when the figures of crime showed a most unwelcome buoyancy, moral depravity was postulated as the cause. Not that the moralists lacked an abundance of material on which to exercise their melancholy, rather they mistook conditions for causes.

In 1836, a Committee of the Liverpool Corporation reported that the following account of the number and earnings of criminals in that town was 'not exaggerated, but much understated':—

	Per Annum
300 brothels, estimated to obtain an average weekly income of £5 —	78,000
12,200 prostitutes, residing therein, 4s. 6d.	124,800
3,000 „ in private lodgings, 30s.	234,000
12,000 men co-habiting with prostitutes, 20s. — — — —	62,400
1,000 adult thieves, 40s. — — —	104,000
500 „ „ who work and steal, averaging by crime, 20s. —	26,000
1,200 juvenile thieves, 10s. — — —	31,200
620 thieves and labourers connected with the docks, who earn by crime — — — —	73,800
Total	<u>£734,240</u>

The Rev. Robert Vaughan, D.D., wrote an interesting assessment of the urban tendencies of the day under the title of *The Age of Great Cities: or, Modern Society Viewed in its Relation to Intelligence, Morals and Religion* (1843). He was not pessimistic about the growth of great cities. 'Singularity exaggerated statements have been put forth on this subject, (the immoral in great cities) by well-meaning persons, who have been themselves

deceived concerning it. When it is remembered that it has been well ascertained, that the women of known bad character in London do not exceed 7,000, while even very recently they have been described in print as amounting to 60,000 and even to 80,000, when it is remembered, also, that the common thieves of the metropolis are known to be little more than 3,000, and that these have been described, not long ago, as numbering 30,000, it will be obvious that it becomes us to look on all reports on such matters with much misgiving, except as they are furnished upon such authority as should entitle them to credit. This number of delinquents . . . is found among a population of nearly two millions: and much as we may deplore this amount of the immoral, the wonder, all things considered, is not that it is so great, but rather that it is not greater.' And he goes on to point out that while the Newgate Calendar may belong to the history of London, it is not that history. We have the same sort of experience to-day – *Mother India*, for example, draws up, and fails to establish, an indictment against a whole nation. But Dr. Vaughan draws a sharp distinction between 'large cities generally', when not distinguished as 'places of any particular branch of manufacture', and towns like Manchester, Nottingham and Sheffield.

'In the places last named, and in the manufacturing districts generally, as the state of society is peculiar, it is to be expected that the tendencies to demoralisation will be in some degree peculiar. Every new form of social existence must bring its evil along with its good. . . . But though there is a large amount of good to be placed over against the evil, no informed and impartial man will pretend to say that evil is not prevalent, and such as should be deeply deplored.' Dr. Vaughan, however, refused to admit that factory operatives were more depraved than other kinds of workers, and he quotes as a just record figures given in 1842 by Sir Charles Shaw. These figures showed the weekend convictions in Manchester between January and June of that year. There had been arrests of 440 males and 206 females, and of that number 320 had been out of employment on an average nearly nine months previously, and of all the offenders only 17 were factory operatives. It is very doubtful if much could be said for the then common view that 'high wages, without a proportionate mental training, were invariably attended with increased immorality, imprudence and frequently with positive want,' as some of the moralists contended.

How did people regard the political system,

which was the only available agency through which reform might be accomplished? The Socialists were critical, as yet, of those who trusted in the efficacy of political action. The working classes, however, were keen advocates of political reform. They took up the agitation with a disquieting zeal. The riots at Bristol and elsewhere convinced even reactionary politicians of the danger of withstanding the popular demand. But the changes effected by the Reform of Parliament in 1832 still left working people without responsibility. Though Cobbett, Attwood and others whom they knew and whose leadership they had accepted became members of Parliament, the political system had not been transformed into democracy. It remained oligarchic. The Reform of 1832 was deeply disappointing, so disappointing that the years that followed the Reform Bill were as dangerous, as full of potential revolution, as those that preceded it.

Lady Dorothy Nevill tells a story of her brother when he was a member of the House of Commons. As he left the House, a great statesman, who had taken a strong clerical line in a heated debate on some religious issue, remarked, 'Well, Walpole, after all, it is curious to think that we have both been voting for an extinct mythology.' The same brother, who had 'quite unusual ability' . . .

combined with 'a truly indomitable indolence', had been plunged into the deepest gloom when the news of his election – he was abroad and refused to come home for the electioneering process – reached him. His cousin, Spencer Walpole, had had to do the whole thing for him, even to be chaired in his stead 'in a scene of somewhat Bacchanalian enthusiasm' in the Market Place at Norwich. After election 'he only attended about three sittings . . . and would have attended less had it not been for the persuasion of Mr. Disraeli'.

Is it any wonder that people talked of 'the insulting enormity under which Parliaments have hitherto been chosen, and which was avowedly calculated with the intent of making one class interest the tyrant of the rest'. Colonel Perronet Thompson, author of the *Corn Law Catechism* and prominent advocate of the repeal of the Corn Laws, probably realised only a part of the insulting enormity of the Parliamentary system of his day. He was a democrat but his democracy was not inspired by any higher doctrine than that of trusteeship. The House of Commons, he would have readily said and indeed did say, should be representative of the nation, but the entry in it of actual working-people would have seemed as unnecessary and degrading of the fitness of the

House to its task as it still does to many people nowadays. If an examination is made of the composition of the House of Commons, surprising facts emerge. In the first Parliament of George III there were twenty-three eldest sons of English peers and in the last Parliament of Queen Victoria there were twenty-seven. The same sort of thing has always been true, too, of officers of the army and navy and of members of the legal profession. Of the House of Commons of 1833, well over a third of the membership (246 out of a total membership of 658), were aristocrats, members of the families of peers and baronets. There were thirty-three members of banking families as well as a more than adequate representation of the still dominant landed interest. It has often been pointed out that what the parliamentary reform of 1832 did was to open the House of Commons directly to the industrial interest. The House that issued from the general election of 1841 was composed of members more than two-thirds of whom were primarily representatives of the landed interest. Nor was this surprising. Everybody knew that property was the best as well as the traditional repository of political power; that landowners understood their people, and maintained the best characteristics of feudal paternalism without its tyrannical forms. The newcomers, the

challengers of the ancient political order, must have seemed 'bounders' to those older agents of government. In the House of Commons that destroyed the Corn Laws the economic grouping shows an overwhelming predominance of the representatives of the landed interest (495), but finance (63), merchants (55), East and West India proprietors (33), cotton and other textiles (14), metal industries (13) and miscellaneous industries (14) show that the range of interests was widening, and if it were possible to include railways, the list would be a still better reflection of the character of the House. Any attempt to present a picture of the House of Commons from a functional angle has inescapable limitations, but it is at least as likely to give a true impression as party labels. The point that the 'labouring poor' are not in the House at all need scarcely be made; nobody saw any reason why they should be. But it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Commons of the 'Thirties and 'Forties could not be described as a microcosm of England, and that, even after the reform of 1832, it was perhaps less so than it had been a century before.

The Reform Bill, Greville said, 'let in a flood of popular influence'. Universal suffrage would lead to the end of all things. 'Universal suffrage is to pick out the men fit to frame new Constitutions,

and when the delegates thus chosen have been brought together – no matter how ignorant, how stupid, how in every way unfit they may be – they expect to be allowed to have their own absurd and ruinous way, and to break up at their caprice and pleasure all the ancient foundations, and tear down the landmarks of society.’ Aristocracy was on the defensive in these days and the middle class was grasping power. Neither was willing to co-operate with the proletariat of industrial town or enclosed village.

‘What brings great changes of policy,’ Lord Morley once remarked, ‘is the spontaneous shifting and adjustment of interest, not the discovery of new principles.’ That judgment was true, if the word spontaneous be omitted, of the House of Commons before and after 1832. Hence, when a whole series of reforms were effected by the reformed parliament, they did next to nothing, at any rate directly, for the working-classes. The new principles that were urgently needed had to be formulated outside Parliament.

There is an interesting passage in Nassau Senior’s correspondence with Tocqueville in which the economist expresses (in 1835) his disbelief that in England the wealth of the poor has been sacrificed to that of the rich. To this Tocqueville replies

with a broader definition of his phrase *le bien du pauvre* than Senior had applied. 'I meant by it all that contributes to happiness; personal consideration, political right, easy justice, intellectual enjoyments, and many other indirect sources of contentment.' And he adds, 'I shall believe, till I have proof to the contrary, that in England the rich have gradually monopolised almost all the advantages that society bestows upon mankind.' Greville, often quoted in this essay because he was as near the essential aristocrat as anyone in his day, wrote in his diary in August, 1835, 'There is something inconceivable, a sort of political absurdity, in the notion of a country like this being on the eve of a convulsion, when it is tranquil, prosperous and without any grievance; universal liberty prevails, every man's property and person are safe, the laws are well administered and duly obeyed; so far from there being any unredressed grievance, the imagination of man cannot devise the fiction or semblance of a grievance without there being a rush to correct it. The only real evil is that the rage for correction is too violent, and sweeps all before it.' Yet he had written in April, 1829, 'Poverty, and vice, and misery must always be found in a community like ours, but such frightful contrasts between the excess of luxury and splendour and

these scenes of starvation and brutality ought not to be possible, but I am afraid there is more vice, more misery and penury in this country than in any other, and at the same time greater wealth. The contrasts are too striking, and such an unnatural, artificial, and unjust state of things neither can nor ought to be permanent. I am convinced that before many years elapse these things will produce some great convulsion.'

CHAPTER IV

THE EARLY ENGLISH SOCIALISTS: OWEN AND OWENISM

MANY people find the history of doctrine, of whatever sort, singularly flat, stale and unprofitable. There is a case, nevertheless, for the history of doctrines that retain their vitality and in any important degree enter into the living tissue of our thought. In some form or other at all periods of difficulty and at all periods of rapid change something like socialistic thought can be found. The legendary John Ball and the actual John Bellers are always about somewhere. They spring from the soil of inequality and privilege, and become articulate as opportunity serves. But it was the new industrialism that gave to vague aspirations a doctrinal form. The emergence of a distinctively working-class movement was not merely a struggle against insecurity: it was a reaching out for the power to control. In early English socialism the positive aspirations of the working-class movement became incandescent as well as their negative protests against the handicaps under which

they suffered. Indeed, the terms positive and negative contain little real substance, however convenient it may be to have such classifications.

‘It is a great delusion,’ wrote Disraeli, in 1836, ‘to believe that revolutions are ever effected by a nation. It is a faction, and generally a small one, that overthrows a dynasty or remodels a constitution. . . . The rights and liberties of a nation can only be preserved by institutions. It is not the spread of knowledge or the march of intellect that will be found sufficient sureties for the public welfare in the crisis of a country’s freedom. Our interests taint our intelligence, our passions paralyse our reason. Knowledge and capacity are too often the willing tools of a powerful faction or a dexterous adventurer. Life is short, man is imaginative; our means are limited, our passions high.

‘In seasons of great popular excitement, gold and glory offer strong temptations to needy ability. The demagogues throughout a country, the orators of town-councils and vestries, and the lecturers of mechanics’ institutes, present, doubtless in most cases unconsciously, the ready and fit machinery for the party or the individual that aspires to establish a tyranny. Duly graduating in corruption the leaders of the mob become the oppressors of the

people. Cultivation of intellect and diffusion of knowledge may make the English nation more sensible of the benefits of their social system, and better qualified to discharge the duties with which their institutions have vested them, but they will never render them competent to preserve their liberties without these institutions.' Such half-truths represent the authentic Tory (or Whig for that matter) explanation of working-class movement a century ago. With all the powers of the State in their hands, the party in power could force events to provide a demonstration of their apparent truth. The parallel with to-day is obvious, whether the parallel be made from other countries' experience or from our own. The difference between this kind of attitude to current problems and that of the early socialists springs from the deeper understanding of the forces and directions of change which was shown by the leaders of working-class thought.

Before entering upon an account of Robert Owen and his followers, we may recall the extent to which their opponents, actual or potential, shared the Socialist view. For the early Socialists were not freaks, abnormal and irresponsible. They were what those in power called 'enthusiasts', fanatics, that is, or dreamers, but many of their

criticisms of society were common to thoughtful people.

The Socialist belief in the necessity of a different system in relation to the land, for example, was shared by all sorts of people. Thoughtful discussions of the land problem were not uncommon. Nor did all minds accept the Malthusian view of the problem of population. Its quality as an opiate, its power to quieten the sensitive conscience and to spread the cloak of inevitability over the appearance of the evil of revolting poverty was by no means universal. Sir Archibald Alison may be quoted. Some of his activities as Sheriff against the Glasgow cotton-spinners in 1838 have already been mentioned. He was the author of a thoughtful book on the problems of population. 'As the division of land,' he wrote, 'is thus the great step in the progress of improvement, so its distribution among the lower orders, in civilised society, is essential to maintain that elevation of mind which the separation of employment has a tendency to depress. It is too frequently the melancholy effect of the division of labour, which takes place in the progress of opulence, to degrade the individual character among the poor; to reduce men to mere machines, and prevent the development of those powers and faculties which, in earlier times, are

called forth by the difficulties and dangers with which men are compelled to struggle. It is hence that the wise and the good have been so often led to deplore the degrading effect of national civilisation: that the vast fabric of society has been regarded as concealing only the wickedness and debasement of the great body by whom it has been erected; and that the eyes of the philanthropist turns from the view of national grandeur and private degradation, to scenes where a nobler spirit is nursed, amid the freedom of the desert or the solitude of the forest. . . .

‘Manufacturing employment, however, is not in itself fatal to habits of frugality; on the contrary, it tends to encourage them when it is combined with separate dwellings and rural residence. There is not in the world a more industrious and frugal set of men than the watchmakers of the Jura, the straw manufacturers of the Val d’Arno, the chintz workmen of Soleure, or the clothiers of Cumberland and the West of Yorkshire. The savings of these laborious men are all realised for the benefit of their families, and produce those beautiful little properties which gratify the traveller in those delightful regions. On the other hand, there is not to be found among civilised nations a more dissolute, improvident, or reckless race than the

silk-weavers of Lyons or Spitalfields, the cotton-manufacturers of Rouen or Manchester, or the muslin operatives of Glasgow and Paisley. How great soever their earnings may be, they are for the most part wasted in the lowest licentiousness; the recurrence of seasons of distress has no effect in inducing habits of economy; the revival of prosperity only increases the oceans of spirits which are swallowed; the return of depression sends their furniture to the pawnbrokers, their families to the workhouse. It is the extension of machinery, the accumulation of men together, which produces these fatal effects. The man who could discover a means of combining manufacturing skill with isolated labour and country residence, would do a greater service to humanity, than the whole race of philosophers.'

Such expressions were typical of the backward-looking mind. Socialists also believed that man had fallen from a state of earlier grace, but they believed also that it could be recaptured. They knew as much as Alison about working-class intemperance, but they did not get it out of perspective as he did. Alison saw clearly enough, as they did, that an industrial proletariat was in process of formation, that labour was becoming a factor of production; but while he attacked the

associations they formed to protect themselves from exploitation, they saw in such associations an agency that would lead to an harmonious society. There was a sort of agreement about ultimate ends, it might be said, but no sort of agreement about methods.

The most fertile influence among the leaders of working-class movements was that of Robert Owen. Owen's whole career is so odd that his critics have sometimes suspected his sanity. Only an imaginative reconstruction of his times suffices to explain it. The surprising thing is not that Owen did the things he did, but that even more did not follow his example. We in our day know something of the pressure of long-continued unemployment. It makes sensitive people – especially those who do not themselves suffer its direct effects – doubt the established sanctions of society and despair of the capacity of the political engineers who are entrusted with the task, to keep the system going. It leads to social introspection and to experiments among those who are not content to brood over the phenomena of collapse. We ought, from our experience, to be able to appreciate Owen and Owenism.

In 1829 Robert Owen had come back to England from the United States. Four years before he had given up the management of his cotton plant at

New Lanark, and for years before that he had been actively crusading for the regeneration of mankind. His work often seemed even to the more generous-minded of his contemporaries a most irritating jumble of sense and nonsense, of the practical and the impracticable, of the luminous sanity which compelled attention and the visionary which repelled it. In America he had been launching a community: he had spent £30,000 on the purchase of Harmony, re-christened it New Harmony, and contributed to it his leadership, his sharp condemnation of 'the whole trading system' which only political economists and those with something to lose could really love, and his gospel, with all its idealism and all its vaguenesses. The community moved steadily, or unsteadily, from communism (not, of course, the ideological communism of our day) to individualism. It was too full of anarchical elements, anti-democratic Godwinites and anti-communal disciples of the Mammon of Un-righteousness, to become a working model of the New Moral World of Owen's catholic vision. He then tried his hand in Mexico, but Mexico failed to respond.

And so in 1829 he came back to England, having lost some £40,000 – the greater part of his fortune – and retained his faith. If it was a faith that had it

in it to move mountains, opportunity would not be lacking to put it to the test in the grim England of the 1830's.

Seen in its practical aspects, Robert Owen's work up to this time had been widely important only in the related fields of factory reform and education. His social doctrines had been expounded and it had become clear that he was thinking 'dangerous thoughts'. But nobody worried about his community experiments and he might still have achieved influence among those responsible for the shaping of public policy, had it not been that he combined infidelity with revolutionary ideas about the form of society. In the lucid interval – always short and always followed by reaction – that comes with peace after war, Owen had numbered among those who were glad to meet him and to examine his views the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury and others highly placed. Among his friends were Francis Place and Jeremy Bentham, and he was in touch with Malthus, James Mill and the economists and radicals of the day. Sidmouth sent round for him interleaved copies of the *New View of Society* (1813) to the leading Governments of the world, and together they went through the criticisms returned from them. If Owen had been content to go on

saying the same thing, or merely refining the details of his suggestions, he might well have become a very important personage – ‘distinguished’ and all that – but he made the fatal mistake of probing deeper into the evils of his day and taking himself seriously in the process. He ceased to qualify for a place in the Valhalla of Samuel Smiles and became, to the good and great, an unqualified bore. In any case, times were so bad, distress so general, and discontent so articulate that flirtation with reformers lost its attractions. A Committee, of which the Archbishop of Canterbury was chairman and Owen a member, asked Owen to report on the causes of distress and possible remedies for it. In the making of that report Owen the reformer began to develop ideas that led direct to socialism and the co-operative commonwealth. When the report was presented, as Owen said later in his *Autobiography*, ‘The Archbishop and the Committee appeared to be taken by surprise, and appeared at a loss what to say or do.’ Shortly after a Parliamentary Committee, which was enquiring into the workings of the Poor Law, refused to allow him to give evidence before it. What could Owen think of these people? What was the truth about them? They had found him out, and he them. He became something vastly

different from the Henry Ford – though there was substance in Owen's claim to be regarded as the model employer of his day – of early industrialism. The loss of the patronage of the mighty was soon completed. Owen turned then to the practical work of embodying his ideas in living institutions – to the building of New Jerusalems in any favourable spot, as it seemed to his critics – and of propagating his ideas. Inevitably he became a working-class leader. There was so much that was true in his analysis of current evils, so much that was practicable at the heart of his vision, so much that was common to his aspirations and theirs, that even the difficulties of communication in a country still largely illiterate and not yet equipped with either railways or a popular Press, could not keep him and them apart.

The working-class movement into which Owen and Owenism entered had of necessity the twin intentions of social and industrial reconstruction. In either shape they were abhorrent to Government. Political reform would break the monopoly of the 'great unpaid' of the functions and fruits of politics: social reconstruction would destroy the status of the propertied interests. Remote as the visions of an equalitarian society might seem, they could not be tolerated too far. No one would object

to Owen or anyone else losing his own money in mad schemes of community-building. But it was quite another thing when people had it in their heads that they could refashion – on community or other lines – the body politic or economic. Their own best leaders knew such ideas to be sheer folly. ‘Three or four years ago,’ wrote Francis Place in 1839, ‘there were a number of weekly newspapers . . . the purpose of which was to excite insurrections against property which, under the name of capital, they denounced as the principal cause of low wages and the depression of the people and the Poor Law as the production of the higher and middle classes, the “plundering” classes, for the purpose of robbing and keeping in ignorance the productive class, who alone were entitled to all the produce and all the commodities in the country. . . . There was foolish Owenism, too, operating to some extent, and great mischief was done. As, however, the doctrines of each of these men differed in some particulars, so the people were formed into more different squads, but all believing or hoping that a change in their favour was about to take place.’ There was never any taint of socialism about Francis Place, but his recollections of what was going on were true enough. Owen had no part in the earlier manifestations of the working-

class attitude to political and economic questions. 'The operatives and working-classes were at this time strangers to me and to all my views and intentions. . . . Their democratic and much-mistaken leaders taught them that I was their enemy and that I desired to make slaves of them in these villages of unity and mutual co-operation.' So he wrote of the earlier phase of his work, years later in his *Autobiography*. Owen could never have become a leader in the workers' political movement. He was not even remotely interested in political radicalism, and radical leaders regarded him as a mere Poor Law reformer, advocating the establishment of what Cobbett contemptuously called 'Mr. Owen's parallelograms of paupers'. What really brought him into the working-class movement was the co-operative side of his teaching. Owen's ideas seemed practicable – as they did to quite eminent people till their inner implications became clear, and then they seemed too practicable – as well as hopeful to many minds exercised about the distress so widespread in the country at the time.

What exactly was it that Owen was saying? Of his voluminous writings those that were clearest and most cogent were composed in the decade after Waterloo. In *A New View of Society: or, Essays*

on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character and the Application of the Principle to Practice (1813) the successful manufacturer, whose astonishing achievements in business, education and social construction had astonished his generation, stated at length the principles which had inspired him. 'Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened,' he said at the beginning of the book, 'can be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means; which means are to a great extent at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men.' 'Any language, sentiments, belief, or any bodily habits and manners, not contrary to human nature' can be implanted in children. What is required, therefore, is to substitute for 'the complicated and counteracting motives for good conduct, which have been multiplied almost to infinity' the essential principle of individual character-formation and social organisation. 'That principle is the happiness of self, clearly understood and uniformly practised; which can only be obtained by conduct that must promote the happiness of the community.' Through the rational education of children from earliest infancy in good habits of every description, ensuring health of body and

peace of mind, this principle can be made operative.

If *A New View of Society* had been merely a treatise on education, it would have made little general appeal. What gave it its public was the success of Owen's work at New Lanark. 'Like you,' he told the manufacturers, 'I am in business for profit.' The new industrialism called for the establishment of factory units virtually on virgin soil. Manufacturers had to establish communities. Provision had to be made for houses, shops, chapels and churches and the other paraphernalia, from 'prentice-lodging to gaol, of community life. As the country was going through a phase like that of the mushroom-town building of newer countries, people could listen to Owen's plan without it sounding silly. In present-day Russian experience Owenite ideas are renewing their youth. Owen could demonstrate his leadership in the field of community-making. He could pay higher wages for shorter hours than anybody else. His workers were happy and orderly. He knew and said that unemployment was coming with the ending of the wars. When it came the Poor Law had to bear unexampled burdens. The workers were in a ferment. The Government believed that revolution was upon them. Owen declared that he knew the way

out, a way out that did not lead through chaos to disaster but which promised a multiplication of New Lanarks. His plan was to establish 'Villages of Co-operation,' which should be centres of production and of education. These villages would be well-nigh self-sufficient, combining agriculture and industry but exchanging their products with their neighbours.

Owen's 'Plan' was expounded best in his *Report to the County of Lanark* (1821). It was first put forward as a plan for relieving unemployment. It became a means to the establishment of the perfect world as its ideal features took more positive shape in his mind. In a rapid series of addresses, lectures, manifestos, Owen made himself its ubiquitous propagandist. If he won no adherents, only short-period sympathisers, among the great, he began to discover followers among the workers. 'At one time I was favourably impressed with many of Mr. Owen's views and more especially with those of a *community of property*,' wrote William Lovett, the Chartist leader, 'but though mature reflection has caused me to have lost faith in "a Community of Property", I have not lost faith in the great benefits that may yet be realised by a wise and judicious system of co-operation in the Production of Wealth.' One hears in Lovett's melancholy the

voice of Rochdale. The Pioneers had community in their rules if not in their practice. A group of London workers established the weekly *Economist* in 1821 to explain 'The New System of Society projected by Robert Owen, Esq.' and to assist in the establishment of co-operatives. Owen wanted more than this. He believed in his plan, and he set out to prove its reality. It was in 1825 that the Co-operative Community of New Harmony was established – across the Atlantic in the freer air of the United States. When Owen got back to England in 1829 he found trade unions were springing up and demanding economic emancipation, that the Reform agitation was being vigorously and even violently supported by the workers, that little co-operatives had been established here and there which by the gains of mutual trading were to grow until they could become full villages of co-operation. He came back to an England that had absorbed his ideas and provided him with an army of followers.

He took up his cause with unflagging zeal. The story of the labour movement, militant and Socialist, in the phase that ended at the court-house of Dorchester is as well-known as the history of Chartism. All the ideas of Owenism were tried out in sporadic experiments, and all the experiments

fell short of the great success that seemed so certain to the enthusiasts enrolled under Owen's banner. Even the disappointment of the political agitation caused no falling away. Men's eyes were set towards the conquest of the new system of society and that society was to be nation-wide first and then world-wide. Co-operative stores, co-operative production, co-operative communities, Equitable Labour Exchanges – for the exchange at their labour cost of the products of labour, not the labourers – followed each other in rapid sequence. Finally there came the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, which was to combine all the workers of the country in a grand assault on the tottering capitalist edifice. The collapse of capitalism was imminent, it seemed. But strikes and lock-outs embittered people. The Derby turn-out and the gasworkers' strike in London alarmed Government. It struck, and the fabric of trades-unionism collapsed instead of capitalism. It was a shrewd blow, shrewdly delivered. Only enthusiasm could have blinded people to the hopelessness of it all. There was no really widespread workers' solidarity, no effective unity of plan, no possible combination of countryside and town. The educational preparation of the workers was no more than propaganda. Owenism had done great things at New Lanark,

and it could do great things everywhere – if all the Plan could be set to work. These revolutionaries were like those who greeted Nonsense Lear in 1848 at Milan, when returning to his hotel he asked for the key of his room that he might change his clothes. ‘There isn’t any longer any key or any room, or any clothes,’ said an enthusiastic Chianti-fired porter, ‘Everything is love and liberty. Oh, what a lovely revolution!’

There followed Chartism, in its public form and to many Chartists a return to the ideal of political emancipation. Like Owenism in its trade-unionist form it was doomed to be attacked and to collapse. And for the same reasons. It was not, nevertheless, the strong arm of the law that shattered these movements. They were premature and they broke down because of their own internal weakness. Together they represent the English equivalent of the Continental movements of 1848. Their ending shows no more than that they were before their time. Their ideal, however variously expressed, lived on, though exiguously. Owenism was canalised in a very temperate co-operative movement and concealed under a very sober trade- (not trades-) unionism. The work of socialism was handed over to Marx and Engels.

CHAPTER V

THE EARLY ENGLISH SOCIALISTS: FORERUNNERS OF MARX.

OTHER Socialists beside Owen issued from the industrial revolution. How could it be otherwise? The inheritance of the post-Waterloo generation was rich as well as baffling. The French Revolution had kindled thoughts and aspirations that Napoleon and his wars were powerless to stifle. The new industrialism offered a vista of universal plenty if it could be directed rightly. The ferment of the agrarian revolution had produced a body of thought, vocalised in Ogilvie Spence and Paine, favourable to land nationalisation. The pervasive common sense of Bentham was casting the light of reason on the darkest corners of the social system: the Benthamite formula, 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number,' had a magic power of throwing into grim relief the miseries of the multitude. That happiness might be made the end of any civilisation was an intoxicating

thought. Godwin had stated a formidable case for reason in human affairs and for social justice, as well as a formidable case against the institutions of government and private property. The economists, too, were demanding freedom from age-long restrictions and monopolies. Ricardo even went so far as to formulate a doctrine which could be interpreted to mean that labour was the sole creator of value. Here, indeed, was grist to the Socialist mill.

An intelligent anticipation of the views of Owen, Thompson and Hodgskin is discernible in Charles Hall's *Effects of Civilisation on the People in European States* (1805). Hall was a doctor and knew the sufferings of poor people in his daily experience. He regarded their landlessness as the determining cause of poverty. Inequality being legalised, the wealthy acquire power over the labour of the poor. The resourceless poor become the victims of the system of property, and capitalists and labourers find themselves in permanent antagonism. The misery of the poor, Hall argues, is not an inescapable feature of society, but the growth of manufactures has withdrawn labour and the labourer from the land, caused the cost of living continually to rise and in rising to depress the poor, and so has placed them in subjection to the possessors of

capital. The propertyless, condemned to labour in mines and factories, have a choice only between starvation and slavery, and the greater part of the product of their labour falls to the owners of the means of production. The wealthy owners of capital are despots as strong as any kings, and the source of their despotism is the poverty of the poor. All goods are produced by the workers and are bought from them at less than their time value. Thus arise the profits of traders, who, through their capital, acquire a part of the product of the labour of the poor, providing them with the materials of their employment and subsistence while engaged upon it.

But Hall was not content with an abstract argument. One of the points of interest in his work is his attempt to give it a factual, almost a statistical, basis. He makes an estimate of the national income and of the share of the labouring population; he concludes that eight-tenths of the population receive one-eighth of it, while two-tenths who produce nothing receive the other seven-eighths. He argues too, that wars have their source in the struggle for wealth and in its unequal distribution. And the way out of the morass he finds, is in the restoration of land to national ownership, and the settlement of the people on it. So, one hears in his

striking and forcefully argued book the echoes of agrarian socialism and anti-capitalism. Owenism has already cast its shadow before.

Was Hall read? His views were discussed and criticised in the Owenite *Economist* in 1821, and he corresponded with Spence. He was not a polemical writer. As he put it in a letter to Spence. 'The only way that individuals like you and I can be of use to them [the people] is by convincing both the rich and the poor, that the evils of the latter are the direct and necessary affect of the system of civilisation and not those of human nature and the condition of human affairs – as the rich and parsons in particular endeavour to persuade them.' Spence told him that he was 'sliding into the system of Sir Thomas More's "Utopia" wherein he makes every kind of property the property of the nation and the People obliged to work under gang-masters as you hint at. But I do not think you will find many willing to go into such a state of Barbarism and Slavery.' Hall admitted that he wanted 'to go back a good way towards our natural state, to that point from which we strayed, retaining but little of that only (to wit of the coarser arts) which civilisation has produced, together with certain sciences.' But he held that the accumulation of personal property should be prevented and that every man should be

engaged, save a few who might devote their energies to the arts and sciences, on productive labour. Yet even though his views were subversive, it was never worth while to attack a man like Hall. His impact on current thought was too intangible and the circulation of his writings too small to attract attention. Yet his work was seminal, and that because it was no mere academic exercise in abstract thinking, but a thoughtful commentary on the defective social arrangements of his day.

A far better-known pioneer of socialism in England was William Thompson. Thompson drew his first inspiration from Bentham and Godwin, and, like Hall, he found the unequal distribution of wealth to be the evil genius of the social system. He drew from Ricardo his theory that labour was the source of all wealth, and he contended that the wealth produced by labour was in large measure applied to the support of unproductive members of society. He derived a statistical illustration of his views from Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* (1814). Colquhoun, like Ricardo, cannot have anticipated that his intellectual children would keep such company. Thus equipped, Thompson advanced a striking plea for communist equality in his *Inquiry*

into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness (1824).

Thompson adopts the prevalent distinction between producers and non-producers. The producers are entitled to the whole product of their labours, but in fact they do not get it. The *natural* laws of distribution are threefold. Labour must be free; it must enjoy all that it produces: it must exchange its products of its own free will. These conditions are not complied with. Labour is not free either in its direction or its continuance: rent, wages, and profits will draw from labour a proportion of its product: monopoly and State interference limit its freedom to exchange its products. In the absence of these conditions, or principles, of distribution, society lacks both security and equity.

Man aims at happiness, and an essential condition of happiness is abundance of commodities and justice in their distribution. Security is a necessary condition of abundance, but abundance of itself (as the experience of the British people was showing) is not enough. There must be an equal or a just distribution, if happiness is to be maximised. The system of private property denies the labourer half the product of his labour, and hence production is always less than it might be. Society shows the contrasted extremes of wealth and poverty,

luxury and want. The only permanent guarantee of the maintenance of production lies in equality. The labourer being compelled by circumstances to pay the capitalist for his access to the means of production, the rents and profits so acquired by the capitalist leave him in comparative poverty. That poverty lessens his incentive to produce: his motive is transformed from a social urge to increase happiness into an individual fear of want and a desire to escape from insecurity. The profits, amounting to at least half the produce of labour, represent value added to raw materials by labour and skill, but capital equipment is essential to the productiveness of labour and must be paid for when labour does not possess it. The deduction from the product of labour to meet this payment is differently assessed by the capitalist and the labourer. The capitalist demands, and gets, the whole value that is added to production through the employment of capital: the labourer knows that capital produces no new values and that therefore only capital consumed or depreciating in the processes of new production should be paid for. The capitalist's reward, the whole of the surplus value, leads to increasing inequality. That inequality diminishes the sum of human happiness without adding proportionately to the happiness of the rich; the rich

grow vicious and spread their vices over the rest of the population: useless luxury breeds unnecessary and futile pursuits and leads to a monopoly of power in the hands of the rich and their agents. If labour's debt to the capitalist be assessed on the basis of the labourer's claim, all would have an interest in increasing the sum of wealth, wealth would be diffused through the whole of society, and equality would be secured.

In *Labour Rewarded*, (1827), Thompson had resolved all his doubts as to what should be the form of society in which his principles of distribution should be embodied. He ceased to hesitate between a society of independent producers – the old domestic system equalised – and a system of mutual co-operation. Owen's ideas had won the day with him. He poured his energy and resources into pre-Rochdale co-operation. His equality included women, on whose behalf he wrote *An Appeal of One-Half the Human Race, Women against, the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to retain them in Political and thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (1825). He composed also a book of *Practical Directions for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities, on the Principles of Mutual Co-operation, United Possessions and Equality of Exertions, and of the Means of Enjoyments* (1830). It is unfortunate that a

chapter of his *Inquiry* in which he elaborated his indictment of the economic and social order of his day never attained more than outline form in his printed work. Yet even without it, Thompson's work influenced John Stuart Mill as well as Marx. The *Inquiry* was reprinted in 1850 and 1869, and through only those that must still read it, it made a permanent contribution to socialist thought and forced orthodox economists to give a place of greater importance in their systems to the problems of distribution.

A few months after Thompson's *Inquiry* appeared John Gray's *Lecture on Human Happiness A General Review of the Causes of the Existing Evils of Society, and a Development of Means by which they may be permanently and effectually Removed* (1825). The book is brief, but it contained the unorthodox valuation of certain types of labour, characteristic of the early Socialists, and a fundamental disbelief in the rightness of the capitalistic system. Its author knew Owen and Owenism, but he was not a disciple. His work is interesting as a demonstration of the socialistic tendency of social criticism prevailing when it was written. It had influence among American as well as English Socialists. There is a pungency in Gray's *Lecture* lacking in his later books and in other Socialist writings.

Colquhoun's classification of society was employed by Gray, and, like Thompson, Gray divided society into productive and useless groups. He found that the productive classes, numbering nearly seven million individuals, had an average income of £11 per annum and an aggregate of ninety and a half million pounds, which was a trifle more than a fifth of the produce of their labour. After allowing a quarter of the annual produce of the labour of the country for the expenses of government, direction, superintendence and distribution, an amount equal to nearly £40 a year per head (about double the income of the master farmers) could have been saved or distributed to the producers by withholding payments made to the useless classes. These unproductive or useless classes included the nobility and gentry ('it has been the misfortune not the fault of the higher classes, to be born under an unjust system'), one half of the army ('the very name of soldier is a disgrace to human nature') and the navy, the legal profession, the wealthier freeholders and half the lesser, eminent merchants, most of the principle warehousemen and shipowners, most retailers ('if any man will walk through London streets and use his eyes, he will want no arguments to convince him that there are, at least, two-thirds

more of this class than there is any necessity for'), hawkers and pedlars, persons in prison for debt, vagrants, thieves and criminals generally, as well as some other categories. The productive classes included workers unnecessary to a better organised society, for example, those engaged in attendance upon the luxurious or in making articles of luxury.

The whole system, in fact, is based on injustice. 'Hitherto we have overlooked all natural principles in the formation of our customs and institutions, and have conducted our affairs by chance.' As the only just foundation of all property is labour, the ownership of land and the interest of money are unjust means of obtaining the products of labour without equivalent return to the labourer. The distressed state of Ireland shows how hard and hopeless poverty is, and the cause of such poverty is found in the principle of competition, which imposes an unnatural limit to production. If the ostensible causes of poverty are unemployment or inadequate wages, in reality these apparent causes are effects, the former of the competition (instead of the conjunction) of capital with capital, and the latter of the defects of the system of distribution. In the present state of society, production is limited by demand; demand is composed of the aggregate quality of wealth, which the labour of the

productive classes, the services of the dependent unproductive classes, and the property of the independent classes will command; the quantity of wealth which the labour, the service or the property, of individuals enables them to command is limited by competition between man and man. The quantity of wealth which the labouring classes, the traders and the capitalists receive is the least that their services can be bought for.

The incomes of individuals being thus limited, that of the whole community is limited. In exact proportion as our power of creating wealth increases, it will be obtained with increased difficulty. Such is the present condition of Great Britain: its inhabitants are in possession of powers by which they can create wealth without any known limits, and yet one half of them are in a state of actual poverty. By poverty man is driven to acts of desperation for the commission of which, poverty, by introducing him into a world of wretchedness, and surrounding him from his infancy with vicious circumstances, has prepared his mind. Nothing less than an entire change in the commercial arrangements of society can be productive of any essential benefit to mankind. The limit which competition sets to production can be abolished without difficulty or violence, and within

a short span of time it will be. New communities, in which no one will be taxed either with rent, interest or profit on his labour, will arise, and in them all will be productive members of society.

As Gray grew older he lost something of both his optimism and his fire. His *Social System: A Treatise on the Principle of Exchange* is a milder book. The socialism has largely gone out of it; the desire to find an equitable system of exchange is its topic. His *Lectures on the Nature and Use of Money* (1848), similarly, fall into a different class of writing from the *Essay on Happiness*. It is this brief and cogent tract which gives Gray a place among the pioneers of socialism. He too stood, by virtue of that essay, in the direct line that led to Marx.

Hall was a doctor, Thompson an Irish landowner, Gray came from wholesale trade. None of these can be described as intellectuals, a favourite term of disparagement to apply to socialists in our day. Nor could that term be fairly applied to Thomas Hodgskin, a naval lieutenant placed on half-pay for a pamphlet directed against the practice of naval impressment. Hodgskin was a man of considerable reading and he had travelled widely. His study of Ricardo left him dissatisfied with orthodox economics, and his association with Francis Place, with whose son he had travelled

as companion on the Continent, deepened his interest in social and economic questions. He was employed on the *Morning Chronicle* – a colleague later described him as ‘an able and accomplished journalist’ – and he was one of the founders of the London Mechanics Institute, where he lectured on political economy.

In 1825 he published *Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital, Or the Unproductiveness of Capital proved with Reference to the Present Combinations amongst Journeymen*. This little book, together with his *Popular Political Economy* (1827) and his *The Natural and Artificial Rights of Property Contrasted* (1832), gave him a following in America as well as in this country, and Marx acknowledged his debt to them. His book was sufficiently striking to call forth a reply from the Steam-Intellect Society, as Thomas Love Peacock dubbed the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

Labour Defended purported to be by *A Labourer*, and was prompted by the struggle for the legalisation of trade unions. In 1825 the measure of liberation granted in the previous year was reconsidered and abridged. Hodgskin was writing in defence of the labourers’ claim. He examines and refutes the case put forward by the representatives of capital for its protection against the

depredations of labour. He declares it to be his view that 'all the benefits attributed to capital arise from co-existing and skilled labour.' He denies the claim of capital 'to the large share of the natural produce now bestowed on it,' which large share is the cause of the labourers' poverty.

The argument of *Labour Defended* is studded with passages of strong common sense that carried conviction quite apart from the theoretical content of the essay. 'By our increased skill and knowledge, labour is now probably ten times more productive than it was two hundred years ago; and we are, forsooth, to be contented with the same rewards that the bondsmen then received'. . . . 'Combination is of itself no crime; on the contrary, it is the principle on which societies are held together. When the Government supposes its existence threatened, or the country in danger, it calls on us all to combine for its protection.' 'Combinations of workmen,' however, it says through Mr. Huskisson, 'must be put down.' Frequently has it contracted alliances with other governments, or made combinations to carry on war and shed blood; frequently has it called on the whole nation to combine when the object has been to plunder and massacre the unoffending subjects of some neighbouring state; and frequently have such

combinations had heaped on them all the epithets of glory. No other combination seems unjust or mischievous, in the view of Government, but our combinations to obtain a proper reward for our labour.'

'Masters are labourers as well as their journeymen. In this character their interest is precisely the same as that of their men. But they are also either capitalists, or the agents of the capitalist, and in this respect their interest is decidedly opposed to the interest of their workmen. As the combiners and enterprising undertakers of new works, they may be called employers as well as labourers, and they deserve the respect of the labourer. As capitalists, and as the agents of the capitalist, they are merely middlemen, oppressing the labourer, and deserving of everything but respect. . . . If by contriving the journeymen were to drive masters, who are a useful class of labourers, out of the country, if they were to force abroad the skill and ingenuity which contrive, severing them from the hands which execute, they would do themselves and the remaining inhabitants considerable mischief. If, on the contrary, by combining they merely incapacitate the masters from obtaining any profit on their capital, and merely prevent them from completing their engagements

they have contracted with the capitalist, they will do themselves and the country incalculable service. . . . The most successful and widest-spread possible combination to obtain an augmentation of wages would have no other injurious effect than to reduce the incomes of those who live on profit and interest, and who have no just claim but custom to any share of the national produce.' No wonder Government struck in 1834!

These in their strength and weakness are typical passages of Hodgskin's work. The distinction of the functions of the capitalist and the entrepreneur was valuable, and it is embedded in a lucid examination of the claim of capital to protection against labour. Circulating and fixed capital, as then defined by orthodox economists, are given a brief but searching scrutiny. Circulating capital is shown to be not a fixed stock of commodities, but a command over labour and goods which assumes the continuance of the social task of production. The accumulation and storing up of skilled labour is the real source of the effects ascribed to circulating capital. 'The success and productive power of every different species of labour is at all times more dependent on the co-existing productive labour of other men than on any accumulation of circulating capital.' Fixed capital, the permanent equipment

of production, adds to man's power. It represents stored-up labour but its purpose is continuous use. It derives its present utility not from previous, but from present labour. To use it knowledge labour and skill are necessary. The vast utility of a steam-engine does not depend on stored-up iron and wood, but on the practical driving knowledge of the powers of nature which enables some men to construct it, and others to guide it. The productive industry of a country, as far as fixed capital is concerned, is in proportion to the knowledge and skill of the people: the efficiency of fixed capital is increased by increased skill and knowledge in those who use it. An increased quantity of circulating capital makes possible an increased employment of labourers but cannot add to productive power. Yet both bring the capitalist the same reward, profit being derived in both cases from the power which the capitalist has over the labourer who consumes the circulating and uses the fixed capital. 'Betwixt him who produces food and him who produces clothing, betwixt him who makes instruments and him who uses them, in steps the capitalist, who neither makes nor uses them and appropriates to himself the produce of both. With as niggard a hand as possible he transfers to each a part of the produce of the other, keeping to himself

the larger share. Gradually and successively has he insinuated himself betwixt them, expanding in bulk as he has been nourished by their increasingly productive labours, and separating them so widely from each other that neither can see whence that supply is drawn which each receives through the capitalist. While he despoils both, so completely does he exclude one from the view of the other that both believe they are indebted to him for subsistence. He is the *middleman* of all labourers; and when we compare what the skilled labour of England produces, with the produce of the untutored labour of the Irish peasantry, the middlemen of England cannot be considered as inferior in their exactions to the middlemen of Ireland. They have been more fortunate, however, and while the latter are stigmatised as oppressors, the former are honoured as benefactors. . . . Capitalists may well be pleased with a science [political economy] which both justifies their claims and holds them up to our admiration, as the great means of civilising and improving the world.'

No wonder Senior produced his 'abstinence' theory of capital, and that James Mill described Hodgskin's views as 'mad nonsense', which, if it were to spread, 'would be the subversion of civilised society'! Yet Hodgskin was an anarchist

rather than a Socialist, looking to an individualist non-governmental society on Godwinite lines. He had no confidence in any magic formula, co-operative or other, as a means of working-class emancipation. Representative government was, to him, an illusion, but democratic association was practicable where men were free from the tyranny of privileged classes. By combination the workers would recover the full product of their labour, and the rights of property, denied from the division of society in the past into the classes of masters and slaves, would lose their force when Government ceased to be the agent of class domination. The wide spread of education among workmen will make it impossible that they should continue tacitly to acquiesce in insult and injury. In the war 'of honest industry against the idle profligacy which has so long ruled the affairs of the political world with undisputed authority' the labourers have on their side physical strength, and a growing moral strength which results from union, while they are losing that reverence for their opponents which was and is the source of their power. 'Till the triumph of labour be complete; till productive industry alone be opulent, and till idleness alone be poor, till the admirable maxim that "he who sows shall reap" be solidly established; till the right of

property shall be founded on principles of justice and not on those of slavery; till *man* shall be held more in honour than the clod he treads on or the machine he guides – there cannot and there ought not to be either peace on earth or goodwill among men.’

Hodgskin was a teacher as well as a writer. He was a leader in the promotion of the London Mechanics Institute and as a teacher in its classrooms, he passed his ideas on to many who bore responsibilities in the labour movements of the day. In his last book, too, *The Natural and Artificial Rights of Property Contrasted* (1832) he warned his fellow-workers against putting their trust in political reform. The moment was unpropitious for such views and his immediate influence waned. He had stated, however, a coherent creed, based on the conviction that economic causes moulded past and present history and institutions. It was left to Marx to follow up the trail that he had blazed, and to purge his socialism of the individualistic dross that still remained. Before Marx took up the torch, Thompson wrote *Labour Rewarded* in answer to Hodgskin’s *Labour Defended*. Agreeing with Hodgskin that it was impossible under individualist arrangements to calculate the labourer’s exact recompense for his share in the co-operative

task of production, he urged that it could only be assured through equitable exchanges in co-operative communities. But Thompson's voice in this respect was the voice of Owen, and to the last of the early Socialists, John Francis Bray, it was unacceptable. In *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy; or the Age of Might and the Age of Right* (1839), a journeyman printer tried to state first principles that would prevent the friends of labour from a-whoring after strange gods. Bray sought not a particular but a universal remedy for all social evils. These sprang from 'the principle of unequal exchanges' which brought poverty in their train. Neither trade unions (though they had their value) nor free trade nor any other cure – all will enable the worker to grasp his rightful inheritance. Only Universal Labour and Universal Exchanges will suffice for that end. Equal quantities of labour of whatever kind must be equally rewarded: there, in quantities not qualities, lies the solution of the problems of a just and enduring society. To get to this millenium? The transition would be effected through a system of joint-stock companies, financed for their acquisition of land and fixed capital by paper-money issued against national property, and managed by local boards. Trade Unions and friendly societies would lend a hand. . . . Was

Victorian worldly wisdom breaking in on this communist dream?

A cloud of witnesses had proclaimed the gospel of early English socialism, but the fulness of that revelation was still to come. Impatient of the claims of expediency, its pioneers sought to fashion wings without knowing the motions of flight. Yet their work was not an essay in futility. If it did not lead to any visible millenium, it did lead to Marx. It was Marx who harvested their sowings. And the grain that has sprung from his sowings is being reaped in our day.

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About the author of this book.

H. L. BEALES is Reader in Economic History in the University of London. He has been for some years a member of the staff of the London School of Economics, and has had a wide experience in the adult education movement in classes organized by the Workers' Educational Association. He is the author of a study of *The Industrial Revolution*, is a contributor to *Johnson's England* (Oxford University Press) and to *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia* (Gollancz), is Editor of the *Journal of Adult Education*, and has written articles in *History* and other periodicals. He contributed the chapter on *The Last Thirty Years* to the much-discussed *Outline for Boys and Girls and their Parents*.

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